

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Calling for a commonsense approach to Indian gaming policy, Congressman Jim Costa, D-Fresno, has introduced legislation in the House of Representatives to amend the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

Costa's bill, HR 5125, would amend Class III of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act to require the Secretary of the Interior to withhold approval of new or additional Tribal-State compacts until each state first develops a long-term plan to administer Class III gaming. "Too often," the Fresno lawmaker contended, "Indian tribes are at the mercy of the shifting political winds of state government."

In his statement accompanying the bill's introduction Costa voiced disapproval of "let's make a deal" time and detailed the hurdles faced by state policy makers and Indian tribes. "Negotiating a Tribal-State compact for the right to engage in Class III gaming on tribal lands is a process complicated by elections, changing attitudes towards the tribe - not to mention the understanding that gaming can be a lucrative business for the state."

Costa's amendment would require states to enact legislation creating a master plan for gaming. Each state's Class III gaming master plan would have to include provisions detailing how many gaming locations the state will authorize, where those gaming facilities will be located, how each state will regulate its gaming compacts, how mitigation efforts will take place and be enforced, along with provisions allowing input from local communities, as well as tribes.

Although Costa highlighted the benefits of this new process, he did call attention to precedent, “historically, merging the perspectives of tribes and local communities has been a process recognized by state and federal government as necessary, but noticeably missing from the present application process for Class III gaming. Getting every party of interest involved in the process - state, local and tribes -- is a major objective of this legislation.”

Noting concerns of those who have already received state authorization, Costa pointed out that his legislation will not prevent tribes from engaging in the application process or affect already approved Tribal-State compacts.

Numerous tribal groups are based in the 20th Congressional District, which Costa represents. HR 5125 is indicative of Costa's commitment to strive for a middle-ground in public policy implementation.

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